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House Agriculture Committee

Dear Committee Members:

As one of the two representatives of the public on the Michigan Grape and Wine Industry Council, I am writing to offer comments relative to House Bill 5025 and Senate Bill 671. As you know, these bills will significantly alter the structure of the Michigan Grape and Wine Industry Council, dramatically expand the scope of responsibility of a reformulated council, increase the number of council members while decreasing the number of voting council members, significantly diminish funds dedicated to council activities (making the reformulated council partially dependent upon annual legislative appropriations) and it will dramatically reduce the funds available for staff who, of course, are the anchor and the core of council activities.

The Michigan grape and wine industry, craft brew industry, and craft distilling industry are bright, shining examples of hard working and creative entrepreneurship in Michigan. These industries deserve the support of the state and account for hundreds of millions of dollars of commerce within the realm of both agriculture and tourism. That being said, I have a significant concern that lumping all three industries into one council will dilute the effectiveness of any council, particularly since each industry has its own unique challenges and support needs.

Because of the fact that these areas of commerce are vibrant and expanding, and can benefit from the support of state government, I believe it is particularly problematic that the funding for staff is reduced to a level that in the original iteration of the bill would support only one-half staff member and in what I understand to be a revised version would support, at most, one full-time staff member. I know from my years of council membership, that the three staff members on the council are extremely hard working and dedicated, and contribute greatly to the health, support, and expansion of the Michigan Grape and Wine Industry. I firmly believe that reducing the funding allocable to staff to a level that would support only a single staff member will be self-defeating, send the wrong message to the industries that are served, and significantly impair the effectiveness of a council, whether it is the current council or a re-formulated council. Staff is integrally involved in preparation of marketing publications, attends numerous industry events, reviews and analyzes grant proposals, provides support and education for those entrepreneurs attempting to establish new businesses, initiates social media support, engages in Pure


Michigan collaborations, attends marketing events in and outside Michigan, etc. It is unrealistic to expect one staff member to assume these responsibilities, particularly if two additional industries are added to the plate. If a truly effective council is the goal, I strongly support maintaining the funding to support the staff members who capably provide the day-to-day work that is necessary for the council to be effective in its missions

For similar reasons, I am hopeful that there will be reconsideration to the proposed statutory language which will make a portion of the council's funding discretionary rather than a matter of entitlement. The Council engages in long term mission and goal planning. Predictability of future funding will benefit planning and accomplishing long term goals

Finally, I respectfully suggest that if the council is going to be reconstituted, that there be space for one or more representatives of the public. Although it is not referenced in the Legislative Analysis Revised Summary, the Michigan Grape and Wine Industry council currently includes two council members representing public interests. These council members were added through the Governor's Executive Order in 2014, presumably in recognition of the fact that Michigan agribusiness and tourism ultimately exist to serve the public, and the voice of the consuming public is an asset to discussion. If there will be a reformulated Michigan Craft Beverage council, I encourage the legislature to consider amending the bill to include public representatives on the council.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael S. Brenton", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

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MSB/jlz